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ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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October, 2004

Paula's Musings.

Our instructor, at the Auburn Society said: "I want each of you to tell me about yourselves." He, however, never followed up on letting us tell our story. Which was just as well. I gave it some thought though and the following would have been my presentation.

I was born in Germany, and as a child I enjoyed reading. The books around our home were German classics; Goethe, Schiller, and Heine's books were familiar friends. I learned the lovely poems by these authors set to music by the great composers; Schuman, Shubert, Brahm, and Silcher and many others. The Lieder that delighted me were: "The Lorelei," " Sah ein Knab ein Roslein Stehn," " Im wunderbaren Monat May," and many others.

I also played and spent time with my cousins: Uncle Heinrich's and Aunt Rebeka's children, Lily, Tootsie, and Trudie, and Uncle Paul's and Aunt Annie's, Gretel, Paula, Matilda, and Arthur.

The culture of Germany, however, turned from these lovely Lieder to songs that reflected the coming horror under a brutal and criminal dictatorship. Songs such as: "Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt, dann gehts uns nochmals so gut," still ring in my ears. The translation of which is: "When Jewish blood splashes from our knives, then we'll be well of." And they meant it, because my playmates, my cousins, my uncles and aunts were all murdered. They also murdered my mother and my husband's grandmother.

As challenging and rewarding, as troubled and rich, as difficult and wonderful as my life was and is, I grieve, and shed tears about the loss of my beloved almost everyday.

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November, 2004

Krystallnacht.

That is what they called the occurrence when they burned the Synagogues in Germany on November 9 and 10, 1938. They also came that night, and picked up my father. I was sixteen years old, we were sleeping, when the Nazis came into our bedroom and looked at us innocents sleeping, one of them said gruffly "go back to sleep." 'Go back to sleep,' sure. When we had the knowledge that some of the Jewish families, whose male member was picked up, later on received the message that he was "auf der Flucht erschossen," which translates that he "was shot, while fleeing."

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We lived In Saarbrucken at the time and I had signed up for a sewing class with the Catholic Sisters. Considering the tragedy, I couldn't continue with the class, but inasmuch as I had paid for my membership the previous day, I explained to the Sister what had happened and I asked for a refund. She agreed and walked with me to the office, during our walk there was not a word of sympathy or expression of kindness, although this incident happened over sixty years ago, I still shudder at the coldness that emanated from that woman.

Within a few days the Nazis came again to our apartment and this time they took my brothers and myself (of course in the middle of the night), to a large hall, where we happily were re-united with my father. The gathering was large and the mood was somber.

We were then taken to the railroad station and were herded into railway coaches. The policy and cruelty of herding Jews into boxcars for deportation to concentration camps was still in its ascendancy, therefore the coaches were still comfortable and clean, in line with German standards.

We were on our way to Poland and the concentration camps. But this was 1938, and the Germans hadn't conquered Poland as yet, therefore the Poles would not let trainloads of Jews into their country.

While the powers to be, in Germany and Poland were negotiating our fate, we were unloaded and brought to a large Synagogue (which somehow was not burned down) in a town by the Polish border . My father was very firm in ordering us to hide, and not let them export us. The Poles, however, were adamant and we were returned to Saarbrucken.

Upon our return to Saarbrucken we were re-united with our mother. She had successfully obtained visas at the consulates for my sister and me. My father had been tireless in his efforts to obtain affidavits for us, and one of his childhood friends in New Jersey came through.

My parents packed a large trunk for us to take to the U. S.. Family treasures, such as candle holders, favorite books, clothes, linens, etc., were lovingly packed into this trunk. We, however, regretfully never saw this trunk again. We took a train from Saarbrucken to Hamburg. I was sick and nauseous on this train ride, leaving my parents and brothers to an uncertain fate, among murderers, was traumatic.

Our tickets to the U. S. were on a German ship, the "Hamburg-American Line." As we were about to board, we were checked in by two Nazis in black uniforms, who looked at these two young and pretty girls, and asked "why are you leaving?" Margaret, my sister, replied defiantly "because we are Jewish," they waved us on.

Once on the boat, I recall an instance, when in conversation with some people I

was questioned about my experience with Krystallnacht, when I started to relate what had happened, I felt a sharp poke in my ribs, and heard a whisper "don't talk." Was Gestapo present? What would have been the consequences if in my innocence I had continued telling of our ordeal? I was very seasick all throughout our journey, which took place in February and the ocean was wild. I laid in my cabin and listened to moaning and groaning coming from the surrounding cabins, their expressed misery resonated within me.

There was much ado among the passengers when our ship passed the Statue of Liberty. At the time though, this sculpture was meaningless to me, because I was too mired in misery and burdened with sadness. Decades later, on a visit to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island they showed a documentary of immigrants, as they left their native country, they parted from their mothers, knowing full well, as I experienced, that they would never see her again.

My aunt and her sister met us in New York and they took us to my aunts apartment. On the way there, they asked us, "how do you like President Roosevelt?" "Fine" I replied. He was a Head of State and he wasn't instrumental in the murder of Jews, therefore I thought he was wonderful.

My uncle Kolber, mother's brother, had had a stroke, he was exceedingly happy to see us. Then my aunt gave us a strong laxative, perhaps to cleanse our system from the 'Old World,' and thus we started our arduous journey in the 'New World.'